

## Perspectives-Message from the Head-Fleur Magazine 2024

Ad hoc quod sum

*To be this that I am*



If Google maps are at all reliable, then as the crow flies, it is some 10,520 miles from Cambridge city to Chowder Bay, Sydney, Australia. The two settings could not be more different.

The traditional custodians and owners of Chowder Bay, a precinct of Headland Park, Mosman, are the Borogegal people. The First Nations called the area Gooree, and the name Chowder Bay itself dates to the 1830s when whalers made fish chowder from local oysters. The view from the Headland overlooks Sydney Harbour and the Clifton Gardens Reserve, and even through the drizzle that described the morning we were there, it was clear that this has long been a very special place.

The particular moment to which I refer is one I shall never forget! A moment utterly unique, powerful and achingly beautiful in its simplicity and humility, one could not help but wonder at the extraordinary power of the things that connect us to other people, to other nations and to other times. Surrounded by our hosts, and including those who had been part of the new commission that the choir would premiere in all six cities of the tour, the men and boys of King's College Chapel Choir sang the prayer of our founder, King Henry VI, to the sublime and timeless setting of Henry Ley.

*Prayer of King Henry VI*

*Domine, Jesu Christe,  
qui me creasti,  
redemisti, et preordinasti  
ad hoc quod sum,  
tu scis quid de me facere vis;  
fac de me secundum  
voluntatem tuam  
cum misericordia.  
Amen.*

Earlier that morning we had been welcomed by Djon Mundine of the Bundjalung people, a celebrated artist of considerable national and international acclaim, and the initiator of *The Aboriginal Memorial*, a sculpture installation now held in the National Gallery of Canberra. The welcome ceremony is derived from the smoking ceremony, a custom both ancient and contemporary, where the smouldering of native plants creates a herbal smoke which, in both a spiritual and physical sense, is designed to ward off evil spirits.

As I stood on that hill, I wondered if our founder would have had any knowledge of Australia at all, especially given the first European landing is documented as that of the Dutch explorer Willem Janszoon in 1606, and it would be another 164 years before James Cook would land on the East Coast.

I tried to imagine how different it might feel if this same group were standing on King's Parade, and whether the connection we had made with our hosts would feel less comfortable, perhaps even contrived or out of place. We must not pretend that the juxtaposition of cultural difference and historical narrative is always an easy one to navigate, and whilst we may more easily understand 'difference' intellectually and even contextually, the visceral experience is often very much more challenging.

But in that moment, it struck me that quite aside from the poignancy of the threads that would weave the connections between that traditional aboriginal welcome, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Latin prayer, and a winter's morning in Australia in July 2024, was the shared sentiment of reconciliation and respect. The differences between us, and the traditions and creativity which our individual cultures may seek to foster, in that moment, would become the start of a new dialogue, a new story, and a new kind of education and learning. There was no attempt to hide the truth or to pretend that confronting history may not be a painful journey.

That morning, history and art and storytelling and music met on the top of hill in Chowder Bay, thousands of miles from our home at King's!

It would be a moment to listen ... and in listening I think we best learn who we really are.

*Yvette Day*

*Head and Master over the Choristers*